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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
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INFO RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 7649
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

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DEPARTMENT FOR G/TIP, INL, DRL, NEA/ARP, L/DL, CA/OCS/ACS

G/TIP FOR GPATEL; CA/OCS/ACS FOR GLYNN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2018

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY CONVERSATION WITH UAEG ON SHARLA'S CITY OF HOPE
SHELTER: "NOT A ONE SHELTER TOWN"

REF: A) Dubai 092, B) 07 DUBAI 0629

Classified by CDA Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In March 25, 2008 conversation with MinState for Foreign Affairs (and Chairman of National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking) Anwar Gargash, Charge emphasized the very positive experiences both the Embassy and ConGen have had with Sharla Musabih's City of Hope, with the shelter having accepted and cared for Amcit victims in particular over a period of several years. CDA raised our concerns about reports (including in the press) about the City of Hope being threatened with closing and Sharla herself possibly being subject to arrest.

¶2. (C) Gargash was adamant that Sharla is under no threat of arrest ("certainly not at the order of the Government -- of course not") if she returns. He also agreed that closing the City of Hope would be a backward step for anti-TIP efforts. Several times Gargash said that "there is room for more than one shelter in Dubai" and elsewhere in the country, and claimed that the three Emirati professional women who are running the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children had left significant positions to take on this important work. He also asserted that whatever Sharla's acknowledged good works in the field of charity (he said he himself "did not doubt" that she had performed many good services), Sharla herself was not above criticism.

¶3. (C) Repeating that Dubai is "not a one shelter town," he said Sharla had been making "relentless efforts to undermine the other shelter," but by the same token Sharla is "not herself above criticism." Gargash said she should respond to her critics rather than "trying to play the part of a moral judge" over everyone else. Representing the UAE Government, Gargash said he personally had "no idea about" reports of children being sold or issues of financial irregularities that had been raised by her detractors, but that NGOs ("like everyone else") are accountable for their actions and subject to audits.

¶4. (C) He said that neither the UAE Government nor the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking is behind the newspaper stories and that Sharla should defend herself against critics rather than suggest that the Government is doing anything against her. He said the press in the UAE has "a certain margin to say what it wants" and it is legitimate on its part to ask questions. He said the Government does not instruct the press on these matters, and added that the media -- or anyone in the UAE -- was free to look into the practices (financial and otherwise) of the City of Hope, which should be accountable for its actions. Gargash commented that there had been no reaction yet in UAE papers to the N.Y. Times story. (Note: The City of Hope is reportedly in arrears on rent payments to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars. End note.)

¶5. (C) Gargash added that when he saw Ambassador Lagon briefly in Vienna (at the UN.GIFT conference) there was no time to speak at

length. He said that the UAEG would welcome training proposals for programs in the UAE and that the UAEG was prepared to pay for appropriate training. (Note: The MFA has repeatedly pressed the Embassy, on behalf of Dr. Gargash, for a list of training programs and options available. End note.)

¶6. (C) Gargash further mentioned that only yesterday the Government had decided to start working on a UAE-wide Human Trafficking Annual Report that would be updated and published on an annual basis.

¶7. (C) On the political front at the Federal National Council, Gargash, formerly Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs, said the Ministry of Interior was completing a final draft reading of the new Domestic Labor Law.

¶8. (C) Comment: With some of the criticism attributed to personalities clearly identified with the Dubai leadership structure (including Chairman of the Dubai Women and Children Charity Foundation Ahmed al-Mansouri), it is somewhat disingenuous for Gargash to totally distance the UAEG from the allegations. The Manager of the women's shelter in Dubai, Afra al-Basti, is also alleged to have worked proactively to dissuade potential donors from assisting the City of Hope, partially as a result of which Musabih is reportedly over 180,000 dirham (USD 50,000) behind on her rent. That said, Musabih has been prone to complicate her own dilemma by holding the UAE reputation up for criticism rather than dealing specifically with the problems at hand; Gargash is a keen defender of Dubai and the UAEG, both of which will protect their honor against detractors. As Gargash once noted to G/TIP Ambassador Lagon, he is delegated to look after the "reputational" issues so vital to the UAE. End comment.

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